

Post-Waterfowl Hunt Season 2013-14 Public Meeting Summary Notes

Prepared by Susan Sawyer, Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge Complex Visitor Services Manager

Date: April 17, 2014 5:30pm – 7:30pm

Location: Stillwater NWRC Administrative Office, 1020 New River Parkway #305, Fallon NV

Attendees:

Norm Saake – retired NV Department of Wildlife Biologist; current Nevada Waterfowl Association Board of Directors

Jim Giudici - Nevada Waterfowl Association Board of Directors

Willie Steve - Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe Wetlands Manager

Trent Barnes - NHP patrol officer; Friends of Stillwater NWR Board Member

Chris Nicolai - Fallon Wood Duck Project Coordinator; USFWS/Reno Ecological Services Migratory Bird Biologist

Walker Price - Fallon Wood Duck Project Technician

Ben Sedinger - Fallon Wood Duck Project Technician; University of NV/Reno

Jim Perkins - USFWS Zone Refuge Law Enforcement, Sparks NV

Carl Lunderstadt – USFWS-Stillwater NWRC Deputy Project Leader

Susan Sawyer – USFWS-Stillwater NWRC Visitor Service Manager

Welcome, introductions: meeting began at 5:40pm, all present introduced themselves and their affiliations.

Individual Comments:

S. Sawyer (FWS): Provided a summary of waterfowl season public use statistics on Stillwater NWR. Waterfowl season on the refuge was Oct 19, 2013 – Jan 26, 2014 for a total of 101 days.

Refuge Waterfowl Season: On October 1, 2013 the Federal government shutdown closed Stillwater NWRC to all public use. This action occurred prior to the general NV state waterfowl hunt season start on October 12, 2013. No hunting (and no public access in general) was allowed on Stillwater NWR for seven days, until the Federal shutdown ended October 18, 2013 and Stillwater NWR was reopened for all public use.

Aerial Waterfowl Surveys: Pre-waterfowl season population surveys were not conducted this waterfowl season. S. Sawyer, through visitor contacts and personal observations on random refuge patrols noted that between November 26 – 30, 2013 an estimated 4000 ducks were seen on open water at Tule Lakes, observed from Center and Lead Lake roads, and from the North, South and East Tule boat launches. Waterfowl numbers declined as the wetlands began to freeze; very few birds were observed on refuge wetlands from December 12, 2013 to January 22, 2014.

Tundra Swans: Season ran from October 12, 2013 – January 5, 2014. Twenty-three Tundra Swans were officially confirmed taken by hunters in the Lahontan Valley for the season – three of which were taken on Stillwater NWR. Several hundred swans were observed within the Stillwater NWR sanctuary(non-hunt area) throughout the season and into early March (Sawyer observation, hunter contacts).

Snow Goose season: A special late season ran from February 1 – March 8, 2014. No hunters were observed and no birds were reported taken on the refuge during this season. An estimated 200 Snow Geese were observed loafing and feeding in refuge fields and ponds, and flying between the refuge, Tribal wetlands and Carson Lake wetland areas. Most of the Snow Goose harvest occurred on the Carson Lake and Pasture unit 10 miles south of the refuge.

Wetland acreage: Within the hunt area north of Division Rd., there were a total of 2180AC of wetlands with water at West Marsh (Willow and Millen Lakes), Tule Lakes (all boat launches open), and Navy Cabin Pond just east of the Hunter Road-Navy Cabin Road intersection.

There was an estimated 12870AC of wetlands in the hunt area without water during the season.

Within the refuge sanctuary/non-hunt area there was an estimated 1561AC with and 5210AC without water during the waterfowl hunt season.

Visitor Use: Visual surveys were conducted from a vehicle by driving on one or two days each week of each month, either morning or afternoon, during the 101 day refuge season. (Survey data available upon request). Monthly results are listed below for all refuge visitor use (hunt and sanctuary areas):

Oct. 18 – 31, 2013: 31 vehicles total (2/3 [22] of these vehicles were observed within the hunt area on Saturday October 19, 2013 for an estimated 71 total hunters (using the formula of 2.3 persons per vehicle average). Four boats were counted at N. Tule Lake; 3 boats at S. Tule Lake, 3 at E. Tule Lake launch.

Nov. 1 – 30, 2013: 11 vehicles, 25 people, 2 boats (Tule Lk. - all ramps were open)

Dec. 1 – 3, 2013: 5 vehicles, 12 people; no active hunters observed.

no ducks observed; no open water (ice covered surface, small pockets of open water with a few nongame water birds in Hunt Zone. Approximately 20AC of open water available on Foxtail Lake in the refuge sanctuary/non-hunt zone, south of Division Rd.

Jan. 1 – 26, 2014: 5 vehicles, 8 people (actual observed by S. Sawyer); no active hunters contacted or observed; 5 ducks (Mallard) observed in refuge water delivery canal in non-hunt area, where water was moving, warmer and shallow, but no other open water was available within any of the refuge wetland units until ice began thawing the last two weeks of January 2014.

Waterfowl season visitor use averages:

Monthly average vehicles observed during refuge waterfowl season was 13.

Monthly average visitors during refuge waterfowl season (using standard formula of 2.3 people/vehicle) was 30 people/month. Primary visitor activities were hunting, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation and environmental education (Sawyer, personal contacts).

Estimated total individual hunters for the 2013-14 refuge waterfowl season was 94. Nearly 75% of this total (71) hunted in the first two weeks of the refuge season, October 18 – 31, 2013.

Wetlands and Wings Youth Waterfowl event:

Eighteen youth participated in the annual two-day Fall 2013 event, with education workshops at the Stillwater NWR shop compound on Friday, Sept. 27, 2013 and a half-day mentored waterfowl hunt Saturday, September 28 on the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribal wetlands about 5 miles west of the refuge. Vans for transportation were provided by Tribal Education Department and drivers were Tribal employees who mentored youth hunters. Hunt success was 2.2 birds/hunter. The event was put on by the Friends of Stillwater NWR, with support and grants from Stillwater NWRC, Nevada Waterfowl Association, Gemini Inc., National Rifle Association, and the City of Fallon. The Wetlands and Wings youth program is looking for opportunities outside of waterfowl season for youth to do outdoor projects, environmental education, habitat improvement and others.

A youth waterfowl hunt day was open for Northern Nevada on February 8, 2014, however, Wetlands and Wings did not hold an event due to lack of open water and waterfowl on Stillwater NWR. Instead, a one-day (March 8, 2014) upland bird workshop and hunt was conducted by the Friends of Stillwater NWR at a private hunt club.

C. Lunderstadt (FWS): He commented on several topics, listed below.

Refuge staffing: stated we are down by four full time positions, and there are no plans or budget to fill those but we are looking at options for doing so next fiscal year. YCC summer youth crew hiring was approved, will start in June with a crew leader and four student workers for eight weeks.

Funding: identified what the refuge will be completing with limited funds, which are mostly maintenance projects such as road work, water control structure upgrades, delivery canal work and vehicle/equipment maintenance as needed.

N. Saake (NWA): Asked about annual waterfowl survey status, first time in 40+ yrs that none had been done and he had conducted most of these. Nevada Dept. of Wildlife (NDOW) has requested to do surveys for upcoming 2014-15 waterfowl season. He stated that NWA had received and denied (didn't specify reason) a funding request for a pre-hunt season aerial waterfowl survey by NDOW

in September 2013. This flight would have covered Stillwater NWR and Carson Lake areas prior to opening day.

He asked about Ruby Lake NWR status of the vacant Manager position and waterfowl surveys being continued there. C. Lunderstadt was uncertain about either but will let him know when he finds out.

He briefed the group on his meeting with Nancy Hoffman (Stillwater NWRC Project Leader) and Carl Lunderstadt to discuss refuge water management and split- season water delivery strategy to put water in hunt area and refuge sanctuary wetlands.

He estimated that water could be held on the refuge until June 2015 if properly managed. He is involved in water negotiations with Truckee-Carson Irrigation District (TCID), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and area wildlife entities.

He discussed use of the new Stillwater Point bypass canal, Goose Lake bypass, and options for controlling vegetation (milfoil, cattail, tules) on refuge wetland units.

He mentioned Harmon Reservoir as best for pondweed production and possible management strategies for that area (drain and dry methodology).

He complimented Stillwater NWR staff for the work being done on the refuge, and for being open to his discussions on wetland management.

W. Steve (FPST): Gave an update on Tribal wetland management, reconstructed areas, past and present use, overall wetland conditions, waterfowl and water update. Stated that 1399ac ft of water is normal allotment, yet only 699ac ft of water was available in 2014 for 499acres of wetlands. Stated the Tribe will not 'stack' water, but rather use full allotment in the first part of the season before irrigation district water delivery cutoff in July.

He asked about the NUMA people interpretive sign on Stillwater NWR at Hunter Road, and the refuge agreed to transfer the sign, kiosk frame and stone base to the Tribe for placement on the tribal wetlands. He noted that former Tribal chairman Alvin Moyle built the stone and mortar foundation so it has certain cultural meaning to the Tribe.

J. Giudici (NWA): Asked about refuge infrastructure projects that NWA might volunteer to help with when wetland units are dry; wanted to know plans, resources and staffing needs for working with refuge on such projects – Carl Lunderstadt will identify and let them know.

Asked about Ducks Unlimited-North American Waterfowl Conservation Agreement grant – how much, what portion is for refuge work and for what?

Answer (C. Lunderstadt) = the refuge received funding for water control structure upgrades; W. Steve (FPST) added that Tribal wetlands received funding for improvements from the same grant.

Asked about Kent wetlands and water in place or transfer options:

Answer (C. Lunderstadt) = water for that property it remains in place

Asked about accessible hunt blind on South Nutgrass unit, when it will be available, to whom and how?

Answer (C. Lunderstadt) : project will be completed this summer, and ready by hunt season 2014, but unsure if water will be in unit (*update as of June 15, 2014 – water will be delivered to*

this unit). Susan Sawyer stated she is working to develop a reservation process for use of the accessible platform by persons with mobility issues, hunters with no limitations, and non-hunters throughout the year.

Asked about the Wetlands and Wings youth program and NWA support:

NWA grants \$1000 to support two annual youth education and waterfowl hunt events, and how NWA can increase volunteer support as hunt mentors. (Sawyer recorded his contact info for 2014 event).

B. Sedinger (UNR): Stated he only hunted the refuge November 29 and 30, 2013 and saw two other vehicles; he observed seven Tundra Swans and two Mallards as he walked in from the East Tule Lake boat launch. He harvested one Canada Goose.

T. Barnes (NHP; FOSNWR): Stated that he hunted December 21 & 23 with 2 youth hunters and harvested 1 Merganser; they saw 2 other vehicles on the refuge during these dates.

J. Perkins (FWS Zone LEO): He patrolled during the Federal government closure on state waterfowl season opening day October 12, 2013 and saw only one vehicle. They attempted to enter the refuge from North Rd. to Millens Landing; occupants were contacted, refuge closure explained and they left. He reported there were no other access or hunt violations during the seven days of the Federal closure. He patrolled a few random times during the general season and stated there were no major infractions and very little hunt activity or waterfowl seen. He received and investigated reports of big game (mule deer) violations on or near the refuge closed area.

General Group Comments:

They asked for the post-waterfowl hunt meeting to be scheduled within the first two weeks after the end of waterfowl season (in February if possible), and to get notice out sooner, at least a week before, to interested individuals including non-hunters and other groups for their input (either by email or in person).

Suggestion was to have the meeting closer to Reno where a majority of refuge hunters and non-hunt visitors live, or have one local and one off-site meeting to accommodate all user groups.

Meeting concluded at 7:43pm, with appreciation from Stillwater NWR staff to all who attended or responded by email. S. Sawyer stated that summary notes would be compiled, reviewed and sent to participants, interested partner groups and a link posted on the refuge website (<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/stillwater/>) in June.